“A Most Happy Holiday”: Rosemary Gilliat Eaton’s Photographic Travelogue Along the Trans-Canada Highway, 1954

Danielle Siemens, MA Art History

A black and white photograph from August 3, 1954 pictures four women underneath the colossal concrete beams of an ore dock [FIGURE 1]. Heavily dressed for a midsummer day, three of the women stand upright while one crouches near the ground with her arms crossed in front of her chest. The women are overwhelmed by the industrial landscape, yet also stand confidently—one might even say defiantly. They all appear slightly startled by the picture’s taking but immensely happy with their present circumstances. Standing from left to right are Anna Brown, Helen Salkeld, Audrey James, and Rosemary Gilliat, all of British descent now living in Canada. ¹ Three days earlier, on July 31, 1954 they had set off from Ottawa in a station wagon packed with camping gear for a five-week trek across the Trans-Canada Highway—or what existed of the extended travel network at that time. Brown, Salkeld, and James each worked for the federal Department of Agriculture and Gilliat was a professional freelance photographer. The latter kept a detailed diary [FIGURE 2] of the trip and of this particular photographic event she wrote the following:

We had a look at the cathedral arches below. The foremen sent us down alone on the lift and showed us how to get out. The unconcern of these men amazed us. I just had to sign a form to absolve the C.N.R from any responsibility for our going up there. When we got

¹ After marrying Michael Eaton in 1963, Gilliat took her husband’s name yet she preferred her maiden name in all professional circumstances, especially in regards to her photographic work. In a letter to Lorraine Monk, Executive of the National Film Board of Canada’s Still Photography Division, Gilliat insisted that all reproductions of her work be identified by her maiden name only. I, therefore, also defer to her maiden name. Gilliat to Monk, April 2, 1971, National Film Board of Canada Still Photography Division, box 29 file 11, ‘NFB Photographers,’ National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives, Ottawa, Ontario.
up, the foremen said you can go anywhere you like but just be careful. Then they sent us down alone. We found such trusting treatment very pleasant.  

The lack of male accompaniment is confirmed by the group photograph which visualizes the women’s presence at this ostensibly dangerous site and underscores their independence as intrepid travellers. Yet, Gilliat’s positive recollection of the day and the accompanying photographic trace are incongruous with other moments of the trip when the four single women received glaring stares or discourteous comments for travelling and camping across the country unaccompanied. The image of a cold, industrial setting is also at odds with the travellers’ desire to experience Canadian wilderness—an idealization that has come to figure prominently in Canada’s construction of a national identity.

The ore dock photograph is one of approximately 800 that were taken or collected by Rosemary Gilliat during the Trans-Canada trip. The photographs (including negatives, black and white and colour prints, and contact prints) and her travel diary are now housed at Library and Archives Canada (LAC) as part of the much larger Rosemary Gilliat Eaton Fonds. Although not consciously intended as such, the various forms of visual and textual documentation function together as a travelogue, which photo historian Martha Langford characterizes as one genre of the photographic album. According to Langford, an album is a tool of show and tell that employs

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3 Wilderness and northerness, as definers of Canadian art and culture, is explored by the contributors to the collected volume Beyond Wilderness, which seeks to trouble and reinvent the idea of landscape art in Canada. As a newcomer to Canada, Gilliat sought a national aesthetic that was different than that of her mother country. Taking a trip such as this, was an opportunity for Gilliat to both find and photograph her pre-conceived perception of a wild and naturally abundant place. John O’Brian and Peter White, eds., Beyond Wilderness: The Group of Seven, Canadian Identity, and Contemporary Art (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2007.)

4 For a larger sampling of photographs from this trip, see Library and Archives Canada’s Flickr album, Road Trip—Summer of ’54… https://www.flickr.com/photos/lac-bac/albums/7215765556775420.
photographs to evoke memories and engender narratives.\textsuperscript{5} While Gilliat’s images and words are not organized into a formal album, in the proper sense of the term, they can be analyzed together to reveal layers of embedded meaning about this past moment in time. In this essay I conceive of photography as a social practice; that is to say, that I do not accept the photographic image as an unequivocal historical record but instead consider how it mediates lived experience. Gilliat embodied the multiple roles of tourist, immigrant, and photojournalist and her photographs can be analyzed across these competing vantage points. In particular, I argue that we can read through Gilliat’s archival material from the Trans-Canada trip to better understand how she used the camera to assert a national, gendered, and settler-colonial identity.

Employing a framework of oral tradition, Langford argues that photographic albums are inherently performative.\textsuperscript{6} While we expect albums, and narratives more generally, to fulfill a promise of wholeness and linearity, this is rarely the case. Albums are never fully knowable, but rather, their meanings are vast and indeterminate.\textsuperscript{7} Meaning is further complicated when an album is transferred into a public space and original context is displaced. To use Langford’s terminology, the museum or archive “suspends” an album’s conversation. A sense of disjuncture is built into the very form of Gilliat’s collection, for it exists as a mass of photographic objects, occupying space outside of the constraints of an album. The presence of a handwritten journal, however, offers to animate the loose images. The words of Gilliat’s diary thus help to anchor—to invoke Roland Barthes’ terminology—the possible connotated meanings of her photographs.\textsuperscript{8} But

\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., 5.
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., 4.
as I will demonstrate, this is not always the case. At times Gilliat’s memories of a day contradict the indexical traces of her camera. At other times, she is notably silent about events captured on film that seem important or startling. A sense of wholeness within Gilliat’s collection fails, therefore, to be fulfilled by either image or text. W.J.T Mitchell, who has interrogated the relationship between word and image, terms such moments of slippage as ‘resistances.’ What is revealed when the evidentiary value of a photograph does not fully support its textual counterpart?

Langford urges viewers to be attentive to the perceptible gaps in a narrative. For it is in these unexplained spaces, that the album speaks and ultimately performs. Interrogating the resistances between word and image, I momentarily anchor the “suspended conversation” and shed light on what this archive can tell us about the social practice of photography in Canada. Informed by scholars who conceive of photography, and the visual arts more generally, as social practice, I emphasize the importance of the activity or ritual of taking photographs, rather than the aesthetic and technical merit of the end product or the photographic object. In the words of

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10 There are a number of photo theorists, including Elizabeth Edwards and Deborah Poole, who argue for an object biography model in which meaning is traced through the various spaces a photographic object exists. While I have elsewhere considered how Gilliat’s photographs function in their published form, here, because the photographs were largely personal rather than made on commercial assignment, I focus on how Gilliat used the camera to frame the nation and assert her own complex identity. I am, however, attentive to the fluidity of photographic meaning and recognize that my reading is but one way to understand this series of images. Of course these photographs may carry alternative meaning for the women on the trip, for contemporary viewers, or for viewers today.
visual anthropologist Elizabeth Edwards, we must look *through* rather than *at* photographs in order to reveal what they can say about social relationships in the past.\(^{11}\)

**Biographical Notes**

Rosemary Gilliat was born on August 20, 1919 in Hove, near Brighton on the south coast of England. Gilliat spent much of her childhood in British Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) where her father, Lionel Gilliat, owned a tea plantation. Upon completion of her primary education in Switzerland, Gilliat returned to London and trained in commercial photography. For a brief period of time Gilliat worked in the studio of renowned British photojournalist Bill Brandt. Under Brandt’s guidance she shot photographs for such publications as the *Sunday Observer*, *Strand Magazine*, and *Lilliput* as well as for history and architecture books.\(^{12}\)

In October 1952, Gilliat immigrated to Canada. After settling in the nation’s capital, she quickly secured employment with Ottawa’s Capital Press and within a year was publishing photographs (and some written texts) in a number of mass circulation journals including *Weekend Magazine*, its French language counterpart *Perspectives*, *Maclean’s*, and the Hudson’s Bay Company’s magazine *The Beaver*. Gilliat also worked on assignment for the National Film Board of Canada’s Still Photography Division, Canadian Wildlife Service, and Canada’s Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources.\(^{13}\) Obsessed with seeing and photographing as much of the country as possible, Gilliat travelled extensively on both


\(^{13}\) For a history of the NFB’s Still Photography Division, see Carol Payne, *The Official Picture: The National Film Board of Canada’s Still Photography Division and the Image of Canada, 1941-1971* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2013).
professional assignment and personal vacation, including trips to interior British Columbia and the Western and Eastern Canadian Arctic.\textsuperscript{14} Even before arriving in Canada, Gilliat was enamored with, to use her own words, the “vast and empty country.” In the early days of her arrival to Ottawa, Gilliat immersed herself in Canadian culture, which included visits to galleries in search of a national aesthetic: “I love landscapes—but few were alive…The trouble, as one might expect is that so many Canadian artists are so busy imitating their European forerunners—there is so little of Canada’s life.”\textsuperscript{15} Arriving in Canada with the preconceived notion of a vast and unruly wilderness, Gilliat was disappointed to encounter the restrained landscape traditions of her home country. Subsequently, it was her love for the outdoors and desire to picture Canadian identity—both geographic and social identities—that took Gilliat all over the country. From the St. Lawrence Seaway to the interior of British Columbia, Gilliat used her camera to see and know the nation.

Gilliat’s 1954 trip across Canada was a personal one, yet as a freelance photographer she was always looking to capture a saleable image.\textsuperscript{16} This is reflected in the wide-ranging subject matter she photographed along the Trans-Canada Highway, from grain elevators and farms to dams and paper mills. Such scenes of idyllic rural life or modern industry lack signifiers of personal identity, allowing the images to be recycled for a variety of purposes and making them ideal for potential sale. Passages of Gilliat’s diary, moreover, make clear that she used the trip partially as a business venture. In Winnipeg, for example, Gilliat visited The Beaver

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\textsuperscript{14} Gilliat’s photographs from the latter are the subject of my M.A. thesis entitled “Photographic Encounters in the North: Rosemary Gilliat Eaton’s 1960 Trip to the Eastern Canadian Arctic.”
\textsuperscript{15} Gilliat, no date, 1952, Gilliat Eaton Fonds, R12438-0-0-E, box 2 file 4 ‘Diary—Canada,’ LAC.
\textsuperscript{16} While I have not been able to determine if Gilliat sold any images from this trip, there is archival evidence to suggest that she desired (and tried) to publish some of the photographs in Canadian magazines, including \textit{Maclean’s}.
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headquarters, where she met with editor Clifford Wilson to try and secure a contract for the purchase of her photographs. Yet, this trip was also a significant way for Gilliat to personally visualize and make knowable her new home—the country she moved to less than two years prior. The Trans-Canada Trip and Gilliat’s other photographic travels thus contributed to her personal construction of a “geographical imagination.” As argued by Joan Schwartz and James Ryan, “photographic practices—from tourist photography to domestic photography—play a central role in constituting and sustaining both individual and collective notions of landscape and identity.” Gilliat photographed people and places in Canada as both a way of getting to know the country and staking claim to it. In other words, visualizing Canada was, for Gilliat, a way of embodying a new national identity.

The Wild Highway

The Trans-Canada Highway was not officially opened until 1962 but Canadians had been obsessed with crossing the country by car since the early twentieth century. Although many attempts were made, a trip from Halifax to the Pacific was not fully successful until 1946 (notably, only eight years prior to Gilliat’s trip). Most people who attempted to travel across the country took a camera with them to record their journey and prove that they, and their cars, made it—or at least tried. Gilliat’s photographs depict a multitude of landscapes and communities, yet

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17 A monetary advance for her work helped to fund this particular trip out West. Yet, I cannot determine from her diary if The Beaver intended to purchase photographs from Gilliat’s Trans-Canada trip or if the advance was for a future assignment. Gilliat, August 5, 1954, ‘Ottawa—Vancouver, Summer 1954.’


19 For an extensive history of the Trans-Canada Highway, see Daniel Francis, A Road for Canada: The Illustrated Story of the Trans-Canada Highway (Vancouver: Stanton Atkins & Dosil Publishers, 2006).
as a collection they are meant to function together as a picture of the nation. The highway itself, often captured by Gilliat from the car window, is a recurring photographic theme in the collection. Images such as *Highway some 20 miles before reaching Kirkland Lake. Good Hard Top* [FIGURE 3] are not particularly interesting for their content or aesthetic—we still take photos like this today—but their banality is important for what they reveal about a national imagination. Interestingly, there is nothing in the Kirkland Lake image—and most other photographs Gilliat took of the highway—that lends itself to a sense of place. This photo, likely taken from the side of the highway, depicts a plain two-lane asphalt road flanked on either side by grass and trees. The road appears to continue into infinite abyss with no indication of the next major site. Even the caption, “Good hard top,” emphasizes the significance of the highway itself rather than the towns and cities it connects. But symbolically the highway unites one side of the country to another in a false homogeneity and the power of this trans-national network is transferred to the bodies that travel along it, thereby enacting a sense of belonging to the land.

Gilliat was very excited about the prospect of a completed trans-national highway that would allow Canadians to travel to urban and rural sites that were previously difficult to reach or inaccessible all together. In her diary she wrote at least twice about the construction of the highway and her desire to document it. On the British Columbia leg of their tour, for example, she snapped a photograph of the uncompleted highway near the town of Golden [FIGURE 4]. The photograph was taken from the side of the road where the women pulled off while waiting for a bus to pass through the narrow passage. The road is unpaved and seemingly precarious; in fact, the bus looks as if it could topple over at any moment. This and other photographs of construction underscore the labour involved in the highway’s making, while also emphasizing the destruction necessary to making accessible those wild landscapes Gilliat associated with
Canadian-ness. In Historian William Cronon’s words, “Far from being the one place on earth that stands apart from humanity, [wilderness] is quite profoundly a human creation.”

In the book *Windshield Wilderness*, which details the history of American national parks and their naturalized relationship to motor vehicles, historian David Louter articulates the irony of the desire for an untouched wilderness that is necessarily mediated by that which is ‘touched’ or man-made—that of the asphalt highway. According to Louter’s account, as national parks were maturing in the early twentieth century, highways were designed as part of their infrastructure and thus cars became essential to their meaning. Cars, writes Louter, “reordered time and space and made possible an entirely new set of experiences with and expectations about Western landscapes.”

Gilliat’s photographs of the highway, while seemingly incongruous with her search for wilderness, are therefore not antithetical to such a desire nor do they contradict the ‘primitive’ values of nature; rather, they emphasize the mutually constitutive relationship between highways and the natural world. Most highways, after all, include preconceived lookout sites that frame picturesque views ideally suited for photographing. In fact, the B.C. leg of the highway [FIGURE 4] appears to have been built into nature itself. Framed by thick forest and low hanging clouds, indicating the elevation of the site, the road meanders through a mountainous landscape, shaping and naturalizing the tourist’s interaction with wilderness. In this case, it is the very highway built by human hands—human hands that at times had to literally move mountains—that granted the travellers access to the ‘untouched’ sites for which they were searching.

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Gilliat and her travel companions sought sites of pristine nature where they could camp and photograph in isolation from vacationers and their cabins. A line of Gilliat’s journal reads, “absolute wilderness seems to be my preference in these standards of beauty.”

A number of her photographs fittingly picture the travellers surrounded by stunning views. An image [FIGURE 5] near Kananaskis, Alberta, for example, depicts Brown standing between two heavy fabric tents. She is dwarfed by the tall trees to her left and the monumental mountains behind her. Other than the tents, there are no other signs of civilization, suggesting that the four women were the first to discover this spot. Yet, missing from the graphic archive are images of those nights Gilliat complained about when the women settled for sand pits or other less than ideal spots to set up camp. This was a result of both needing to stop wherever was available and a desire for secluded locations where the women could change and wash in private. Most of Gilliat’s photographs also ignore over crowded tourist sites or unappealing landscapes, choosing instead to capture endless golden prairies, rolling hills, or majestic Rocky Mountains. The photographic absence of disagreeable sites is in part a reflection of Gilliat’s training in commercial photography and a more general socially imagined ideal of wilderness. Whether a fully conscious effort or not, Gilliat constructed a visual narrative of her road trip that she believed to be more palatable to other observers and to herself in later years.

Although Gilliat dedicated much of her time to seeking and picturing Canadian wilderness, not all the images in the travelogue are of nature. Many depict industrial sites associated with modernity and progress. In a photograph [FIGURE 6] near Port Arthur, Ontario James overlooks a paper mill, which, despite the billowing smoke clouds and James’ windswept

hair, appears oddly still and calm, echoing James’ contemplative mood. This and other photographs of modern industry might reflect in part Gilliat’s desire to capture views that would appeal to a national magazine readership. They also underscore her seemingly contradictory desire for a Canada of natural abundance and a progressive, prosperous Canada. In the black and white photograph of James, the entire body of water is bordered by industry. Yet, nature and industry melt into one another as the factory’s edge bleeds into the water and the billows of smoke seamlessly overlap the white fluffy clouds. Art historian John O’Brien argues that nature has always been mediated by technological, economical, and political forces. In his words, “Wilderness and capitalist modernity in Canada went hand in hand.”

Gilliat’s photographs of both the highway and sites of industrial expansion thus visualize the naturalized relationship between wilderness and modernity.

**Women on the Road**

The women’s road trip was not atypical for the time. Women travelled unaccompanied and road trips were becoming popular subject matter for arts and literature. Robert Frank, for example, travelled across the United States in 1955 and later published a popular book of photographs titled *The Americans* with a literary introduction by Jack Kerouac. Although Frank’s photographs were a commissioned project, my point is to illustrate how travel and imaging a nation were common and continuing visual trends. But while the women’s road trip was not extraordinary, they still confounded conventional narratives of gender. In fact, the travelogue never lets you forget that *women* completed this Trans-Canada trek from Ottawa to

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Vancouver. Often picturing her friends as the subject of her photographs, Gilliat presented them—and herself in turn—as strong, adventurous and independent women. The very first photograph of the trip [FIGURE 7], for example, depicts the four travellers standing beside their car before taking off. Through the windows one can see that the car is packed to the roof, indicating their intention to camp along the way. They do not appear fearful or nervous, but excited, happy, and prepared.

Photographs that picture the women travellers often represent a performance of labour and/or a connection to the land. Two photographs of Brown, for example, picture her performing typical camping chores. In one she bends over a portable stove to make a meal [FIGURE 8] and in the other, crouches on a lake’s edge to wash dishes [FIGURE 9]. Gilliat’s caption for the latter reads, “Who likes washing dishes anyway?” Although such a chore is often associated with the domestic sphere—read feminine—here Brown undertakes this tiresome duty within an outdoor setting and the textual caption for the photograph rejects dishwashing as an enjoyable and naturally feminine activity. In a number of Gilliat’s photographs, including the two of Brown, the women perform duties typically coded as feminine yet subvert traditional boundaries by working outside and for themselves only, rather than for husbands and families.

But why picture such mundane activities at all? On the one hand, photographing the women performing camp duties might have been a vehicle through which to picture the landscape. More often than not, the women camped in relatively isolated areas surrounded by picturesque views. In both photographs of Brown, for example, she occupies the foreground or middle ground, while a landscape of water and forest extends into the horizon. On the other hand, such images reveal to the viewer that the women took this trip without male companions.
Not only did they wash and work on their car, but they made meals and cleaned dishes without the aid of male labour.

While it is common to photograph one’s travel companions, we can read this specifically gendered travelogue through feminist photography studies. Susan Close, for example, has argued that women photographers at the turn of the twentieth century used photography as a social practice to establish and assert identity, employing images to “situate themselves in an alien environment.” In Gilliat’s case, it was important both as a woman and as a British immigrant to visualize and thus situate herself in the Canadian landscape. Rarely a self-portraitist, Gilliat photographed her female friends as a reflection and assertion of her own identity. A photograph of James and Salkeld [FIGURE 10] pictures the travellers surrounded by a mountainous landscape. While women have been historically associated with the irrationality or sublime beauty of nature and thus the need to be tamed, in this image the travellers instead occupy the position of explorer, typically coded as masculine. Taken from a low angle, James and Salkeld appear strong and dominating—if also, somewhat nonchalant—as if conquering this place they now call home.

In another photograph, James reads a roadside map of the Trans-Canada Highway [FIGURE 11]. The pen and paper in hand emphasize the mental labour involved in reading a map and planning a route—navigating skills often associated with the male explorer. This particular image, however, also emphasizes mobility and the women’s escape from a domestic sphere. Photographs from or of the car similarly underscore their mobility. Another photograph of a roadside sign near the Big Bend highway [FIGURE 12], while seemingly mundane and ever

24 Close, Framing Identity, viii.
so morbidly comical, underscores the danger involved in driving across the country. (Especially a highway, yet to be fully paved, that traverses through the Rocky Mountains at times without safety railings.) This image and the one of highway construction [FIGURE 4] both emphasize the precariousness of highway travel at this time. While photographs of a relatively deserted road [FIGURE 3], on the other hand, emphasize the rarity of their trip—such a trek across Canada was, after all, still a relatively uncommon undertaking, and even more so for a group of women.

In her contribution to the edited volume Trading Gazes, literary scholar Lisa MacFarlane examines the journals, photographs, and published writing of American photographer Mary Schäffer and her work in the Canadian Rocky Mountains. Although Schäffer worked about half a century earlier than Gilliat there are comparisons to be drawn between the two. MacFarlane spends a portion of her essay examining the ways in which Schäffer portrayed herself in both photographs and her published writing. One particularly striking image from 1907, which was taken by Schäffer’s travel companion Mollie Adams, depicts Schäffer atop a horse, wearing a fringed jacket surrounded by a mountainous landscape. The team of people she travelled with, as well as the twenty or so pack horses and bundles of equipment they carried, are conspicuously absent from the photograph. MacFarlane argues that through this image Schäffer self-fashioned herself as an exotic type, “the lady adventurer in control of herself and her horse and comfortable with her place.”

By Gilliat’s time, the women had long ago traded in horses for motorized vehicles, yet the sentiment remains the same. Photographs such as James reading a

map [FIGURE 11] or the four women about to hit the road [FIGURE 7] similarly focus on the women’s mobile bodies exploring the country around them.

But what is missing from these photographs is a commentary on those moments the women were criticized for failing to perform femininity properly. On August 27th the women dipped down into the United States on their way back East. Gilliat wrote about being nervous to cross the American border with British passports. But to her dismay, when they arrived at the border, the guard mistook them for four school teachers on a weekend trip and let them cross with ease.26 Upset by the guard’s gender stereotyping, Gilliat’s diary seems to suggest that the travellers would have opted for a bit more hassle if only it meant they could have asserted their identity as hard working women with occupations outside of normative gender standards. Gilliat also wrote about a few rural communities being confused by their presence and unsure of what to make of four single, educated women. In Esten, Saskatchewan, where the travellers visited Salkeld’s family, Gilliat wrote: “Everyone in these parts gets married as soon as they’re out of school—and so they are puzzled by the form of us.”27 The diary entries that confound the impression we get from the photographs thus work to heighten the importance of Gilliat’s images of her travel companions and make visible the gender stereotypes that they actively worked to defy.

Yet, there are a small group of photographs that depict the women performing more stereotypical roles of femininity, including images of the travellers maintaining accepted levels of cleanliness and beauty while driving and camping across the country. In one series of photographs, James is pictured seated on the ground in a prairie landscape while washing her feet

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27 Ibid., August 9, 1954.
The colour photograph in particular emphasizes James’ rouged lips and clean white skin. A number of other photographs similarly picture the women in various outdoor sites with makeshift washing stations and vanities that allowed the travellers to maintain certain levels of decorum. Photographs of domestic labour and self-pamper, while set outside the confines of the home, still conform to ostensibly feminine standards of cleanliness and beauty. In the end, the four educated British women could never fully embody the role of the ‘primitive,’ anti-modern traveller—after all, they still drove a car and visited urban centres such as Calgary, Winnipeg, and Vancouver, places in which they were expected to appear ‘respectable.’ The women, moreover, while resistant to modern technologies and comfortable amenities, were temporary tourists who would eventually return to the comforts of their urban dwellings in Ontario. However, when viewed together, photographs of the travellers, from undertaking car maintenance to applying red lipstick, function as a performance of complex and multivalent identities working to trouble more stereotypical representations of women and femininity.

Photographing the Other

Gilliat’s photographs of her travelling companions in the wilderness can also be situated within a colonial framework of landscape photography that worked to control nature and dispossess Indigenous peoples of the land. First Nations and Metis communities are notably absent from Gilliat’s Trans-Canada photographs, despite her clear interest in Canada’s Indigenous peoples. A few times throughout her diary Gilliat briefly commented on moments

28 Gilliat, however, took many photographs of Indigenous peoples (usually on commercial assignment) throughout her career, see Siemens “Photographic Encounters in the North.” For a sampling of her work in the Arctic and photographs of Inuit, see Library and Archives Canada’s Flickr album, https://www.flickr.com/photos/lac-bac/sets/721576281356969830/.
when she saw Indigenous communities in urban settings. Passing through Yale, British Columbia, for example, Gilliat wrote:

A poor old Indian woman with a tragic expression sat just in the doorway... there seemed to be a considerable number of Indians in this area. The others saw a whale picnic party of little Indian children.29

While seemingly surprised to see First Nations people in an urban setting, Gilliat did not elaborate on her experience or feelings. On another occasion in Lethbridge, Alberta the women happened upon a lively town fair and Gilliat commented on the presence of diverse cultural groups, including “Indians.”30 Although there exist a few photographs of the festivities, none picture the Indigenous peoples Gilliat seemed surprised to see. A week later, passing through Salmon Arm, British Columbia, the women came upon an “Indian Settlement,” where Gilliat saw Indigenous peoples gathering around a Canadian priest about to perform a burial service.31 Unable to stop and visit, Gilliat reflected in her journal: “such brief impressions one gets of different lives as one flashes by in a car.”32 While speaking to the constraints of vehicular travel, thus explaining the absence of photographic evidence of this moment, Gilliat’s ruminations also underscore her surface level engagement with Indigenous culture viewed from the spatial and temporal distance of a car window. In part, Gilliat avoided photographing people, particularly those of a cultural background different than her own, because she did not want to invade their privacy. She was keenly aware of the objectifying gaze of the camera and was conscious of her own position of racial and cultural privilege. Yet, the general absence of other people from

31 Gilliat did not provide any more information about the location of this encounter. However, she was likely describing the Neskonlith Indian Band of the Secwepemc Nation.
Gilliat’s landscape photographs, and particularly Indigenous bodies, emphasizes the uninhabited wilderness and the women as explorer types—thus also working to dispossess Indigenous peoples of the land.

There are, however, a few notable moments when Gilliat reflected upon her colonial subjectivity. One particularly long diary entry from August 10th details Gilliat’s visit to a museum in Maple Creek, Saskatchewan. There she learned about the Cypress Hills Massacre of 1873 and reflected upon Canadians’ general ignorance of colonial history and the guilt weighing on the settler conscience. Yet her sense of empathy for Canada’s Indigenous peoples is at odds with other points in the diary where she wrote (and sometimes photographed) respectfully, if not reverentially, about the Canadian Pacific Railway and farming culture—both inherently colonizing practices.33

Her diary is also full of reminiscences about missed photographic moments; moments when she wished to take pictures but was constrained by time or weather. One notable example occurred in Montana where Gilliat desired to stop in Browning within the Blackfoot Indian Reserve where the annual meeting of the Plains Indians was taking place. Her companions’ desire to get home in good time, however, deterred her from capturing this moment on camera.

While Gilliat exhibited respect for the original inhabitants of the land, she also played into a primitivizing desire for possessing the Other. The absence of photographs of Indigenous

33 This tension runs throughout Gilliat’s life and career. In my M.A. thesis I argue that Gilliat, herself disadvantaged by gender, empathized with Indigenous peoples and displayed an outward respect that was at odds with the attitude of Euro-Canadian society at large. Yet, also advantaged by race, Gilliat was a participant in the very colonial system of which she was critical and as a photographer she both constituted and was constituted by romantic stereotypes of Indigenous peoples, particularly Inuit. Siemens, “Photographic Encounters in the North.”
peoples, however, erases them from the land and a greater national imaginary. Moreover, without the linguistic anchorage of Gilliat’s diary, recognition of the nation’s first peoples would have been erased all together. Yet, this same absence might be read as an act of respect in which Gilliat resisted the colonial gaze and the inherent violence of the photographic act. However, it is also likely, that the absence of Indigenous portraits is a matter of Gilliat’s cultural conditioning, or the ‘pre-texts’ of looking that she brought to her national imagining of Canada. In those places, such as Yale or Lethbridge, where Gilliat could have snapped photographs of Indigenous peoples, she chose not to. Perhaps this was because they did not conform to her expectations of ‘Indianness.’ Whereas, people of or visiting the Blackfoot Indian Reserve (where Gilliat was unable to take photographs due to logistical constraints) would have more likely fit the ‘Indian’ stereotype she was expecting to find and looking to capture (and likely knew would be saleable).

Returning to Schäffer, MacFarlane argues that the lack of portrait photographs, of both settlers and Indigenous peoples, from Schäffer’s published books was a deliberate choice to picture the landscape as uninhabited and available for exploration by her and her travelling party. As discussed earlier, Gilliat’s photographs similarly capture an idyllic landscape either empty or occupied solely by the women travellers. Yet her diary, just as Schäffer’s before her, illuminates the encounters between herself and Indigenous peoples. Schäffer, for example, traded photographs with Indigenous people for geographical information or bead and leatherwork. Gilliat, on the other hand, generally looked onto and speculated about First Nations from both a spatial and historical distance. She did, however, also engage in the purchasing of Indigenous

35 McFarlane, “Mary Schäffer’s ‘Comprehending Equal Eyes,’” 125.
products. But while Schäffer’s and Gilliat’s graphic archives fail to conform to ethnographic representations and therefore work to “demystify imperial practices of seeing and recording,” their written texts underscore the interlocking ideologies of race and gender that informed their travels and photographic practices.36

Gilliat’s desire to picture the cultural Other extended beyond North America’s first peoples. On August 4th the travellers arrived in Headingley, Manitoba where they visited a Hutterite colony and were shown around by a few women of the community. Within the Trans-Canada series there are a number of photographs of young Hutterite women that match up with Gilliat’s diary timeline. Looking at these images, I was immediately struck by the unhappy, defensive looking facial expressions of these young women [FIGURE 14]. None crack a smile and some stand with their arms crossed over their chests. Intrigued by Hutterite life, Gilliat devoted at least a paragraph to describing her experience, paying close attention to the differences between men’s and women’s labour roles. But there is no mention of taking any photographs in Headingley. In fact, Gilliat twice wrote about actively resisting the desire to photograph the Hutterite women:

One most adorable fair-headed girl came up to us and smiled and smiled, we longed to photograph her but did not like to ask.

We didn’t even ask to take photos as we felt the friendliness would vanish.37

If Gilliat consciously decided not to photograph the young women for fear of a hostile reaction, how then did these photographs come to be? Three of the images are even labeled with one of the young woman’s names, clearly indicating some sort of relationship between

36 Ibid., 147.
photographer and subject. The name, Christina Gross, however is not written in Gilliat’s diary. There are a number of reasons that could explain the discrepancy between the graphic and textual archives. Perhaps Gilliat wrote in her diary a few days after the fact and forgot that she took these photos or maybe they were taken by one of her travel companions and ended up in her collection. According to Langford, historic travelogues are often riddled with inconsistencies:

There is no guarantee that the compiler was aware of, or could have explained, his or her leaps and digressions. Not all communication is conducted in the open or with full consciousness of its effects.38

It is unlikely that I will ever know what actually took place that summer day in 1954, but the resistance between word and image makes for a compelling analysis today. There are a number of other reasons that might explain the slippage between the visual and textual trace. Perhaps, anticipating the public role of her diary, Gilliat chose to construct an image of herself as an ethical photographer. Or maybe she did seek permission to photograph the young Hutterite women but, when met with hostility, chose to not write about the uncomfortable encounter. While the existence of these photographs is at odds with Gilliat’s written account, the facial expressions of the sitters, notably, are not. Just as Gilliat feared that the women would be put off by the request to take their picture, they appear stern, unimpressed, and slightly hostile towards the presence of the camera. Almost all of the young women return the camera’s gaze, actively acknowledging its presence while resisting standard photographic tropes such as smiling. And while their clothing and hairstyles signify a cohesive group, they are not engaged in the activities or labour that Gilliat thoroughly described in her diary. They are not baking bread in passive avoidance of the camera but rather, standing directly in front of it in acknowledgment, if not

38 Langford, Suspended Conversations, 19.
agreement, with the photographic contract. The Hutterite girls, therefore, fail to conform to Gilliat’s Othering descriptions.

Gilliat wrote about a number of other cultural groups she encountered on her Trans-Canada trip, including Doukhobors, Ukrainians, and Chinese. Her interest in the diverse cultural populations of Canada suggests that, as a non-Canadian herself, she desired to understand and seek belonging in her new home. However, I should be careful not to over-sentimentalize Gilliat’s immigrant experience. As a British born photojournalist, Gilliat naturally occupied a privileged role despite having been in the country for less time than many of the people she considered as Other. She did, moreover, use the camera, on this trip and in her photographic oeuvre more generally, to document and aestheticize marginalized cultural groups.

CONCLUSION

To conclude let us turn back to Langford: “Conceiving the album as an act of communication means reactivating a suspended conversation that fills in those gaps by reawakening the actors, the… ‘tellers and listeners.’”

Gilliat’s loose photographs that exist outside of the frame of an album, allow for a freer narrative not grounded by text or layout. Her photographs, however, are also supplemented by the inclusion of a diary, which extends the photographic performance, further entangling the images in a social history. Yet, Gilliat’s linguistic ruminations do not always anchor the trip’s photographs in a cohesive and linear narrative—they fill some gaps and create others. Drawing on Langford’s theoretical engagement with the performative capability of photographs, I hope to have shown how reading beyond the photographic borders and between the diary lines reveals a great deal about the social practice of ________________

39 Ibid.
photography in Canada and the role that it played in the construction of a national, gendered, and settler-colonial identity.

I, however, am only one interpretive voice in the re-activating of this travelogue. There are, of course, a number of ways to read Gilliat’s photographs and a recent digital initiative has allowed them to continue to take on new meaning today. In recent years Library and Archives Canada has employed social media sites such as Facebook and Flickr to reach diverse viewers beyond the physical archive. On July 31, 2015, 61 years after Gilliat’s Trans-Canada Highway trip, LAC began their own digital journey across the country, posting images and accompanying text for everyday of the 38 day journey. One of LAC’s most successful online projects, Facebook users had the opportunity to actively engage with archival content by commenting on and sharing images from the trip. Many users identified and debated locations or buildings that had been altered by the passing of time. While others connected to the images by recalling their own memories of Canadian road trips. Such a project, which brought a diverse community of people together (including some family members of the travellers) to view historic photographs and share their own stories, illuminates the fluidity of photographic meaning. Once personal traces of four women’s adventure across the country, today Gilliat’s photographs continue to accrue layers of meaning. They are both useful documents of history, recording aspects of mid-twentieth century Canada, and images that invoke more private recollections. This particular online project

40 One particularly notable online initiative is Project Naming, which, since 2002, has sought to name anonymous Inuit figures in LAC’s photographic holdings, to enable Inuit youth to connect with their elders, and to bridge cultural and geographical distances between Nunavut and Canada’s South. Recently expanded to include images of First Nations and Metis, Project Naming maintains an extensive digital database, which researchers can search and contribute to if they recognize a sitter in a photograph. A number of Gilliat’s photographs have been added to this database, some of which have been correctly identified. http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/aboriginal-heritage/project-naming/Pages/introduction.aspx.
also brought some timely recognition to Rosemary Gilliat—an important but little known figure in the history of Canadian photography.
Figure List

Figure 1. Rosemary Gilliat, Anna Brown, Helen Salkeld, Audrey James and Rosemary Gilliat below an ore dock, Port Arthur [now Thunder Bay], Ontario, August 3, 1954, black and white negative gelatin silver. Rosemary Gilliat Eaton Fonds, Library and Archives Canada, R12438-0-0-E, MIKAN 4306215.


Figure 4. Rosemary Gilliat, Daily Calgary bus passes through a blasting area in Kicking Horse Canyon, BC. Travel is between 5pm and 8 am only on this stretch, August 1954, black and white gelatin silver print. Rosemary Gilliat Eaton Fonds, Library and Archives Canada, R12438-0-0-E, MIKAN 4359684. http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&rec_nbr=4359684&lang=eng.


Figure 12. Rosemary Gilliat, *Advice to motorists at the tip of Big Bend on Columbia River, BC*. August 1954, black and white gelatin silver print. Rosemary Gilliat Eaton Fonds, Library and Archives Canada, R12438-0-0-E, MIKAN 4359683.  

Figure 13. Rosemary Gilliat, *Makeshift bath in Prairies. Audrey James washing up, Portage-la-Prairie, Manitoba*. August 5, 1954, 6.0 cm x 6.0 cm colour slide. Rosemary Gilliat Eaton Fonds, Library and Archives Canada, R12438-0-0-E, MIKAN 4323886.  

Figure 14. Rosemary Gilliat, *Group of Hutterite girls (Christina Gross 2nd from right), Headingley, Manitoba*. August 5, 1954, 6.0 cm x 6.0 cm colour slide. Rosemary Gilliat Eaton Fonds, Library and Archives Canada, R12438-0-0-E, MIKAN 4323657.  
Bibliography


